

SECRET

(Approved by Mr. Merchant  
as more complete record of  
earlier report which had  
been approved by the Secretary)

UNITED STATES DELEGATION  
TO THE  
WESTERN FOREIGN MINISTERS' MEETING  
Paris, April 29 - May 2, 1959

MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

Date: May 1, 1959

Time: 3:30 p.m.

Place: Hotel Matignon

Participant

United States

The Secretary of State  
Ambassador Houghton  
Mr. Merchant  
Mr. Lyon  
Mr. McBride

France

Prime Minister Debré  
Foreign Minister Couve de  
Murville  
M. Lucet  
M. Amanrich

Prime Minister Debré opened the meeting expressing his satisfaction at the visit of the Secretary and referred to the heavy responsibilities which the Secretary had assumed, and the great expectations which the world had for the future. Foreign Minister Couve de Murville said he thought the meetings this week in Paris had gone well, and faster than expected. The Secretary said we hoped the Geneva Foreign Ministers' meeting would also go well though of course that would be more difficult. He hoped the four Western powers could maintain there the same friendly relations. Couve said that the talks of the past two days in Paris proved that we would not organize every step of the Geneva meeting in advance, and that the principal problems were, after all, not among ourselves or even with the British, but with the Soviets. Debré said that the Soviets were very anxious to have some success over Berlin and that the British failure to realize this fact was a serious problem for the Germans and for ourselves. However, to let them have a success on Berlin would definitely harm the Atlantic Alliance.

Couve said that the French believed the Foreign Ministers' meeting was important in itself and not just as a preview to a summit meeting. The Geneva meeting must outline something for the future. The British wished to leave substantive discussion to a summit meeting which was not suited to such discussions. Debré asked if we thought that a summit

meeting

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224  
By BE NARA, 5-18-90

*Memo Conv*

SECRET

-2-

meeting should have a different and broader agenda than a Foreign Ministers' meeting. The Secretary replied in the affirmative and said that of course at a summit meeting, the Heads of Government were free to evoke any problems which they wished. Debré agreed and said that, if the Soviets really wished to talk about a wide variety of things, we should query them about the Middle East and the Far East. Also, we should warn them about creating incidents in other areas of the world.

The Secretary then referred to the de Gaulle Plan for aid to underdeveloped areas and said de Gaulle was of course free to raise this at a summit meeting, but we would like further details regarding this plan. In reply, Debré referred to East-West differences on a number of issues, and thought that the difficult economic situation in various areas of the world gave the Soviets room to maneuver and to blackmail us. He wondered if we could not reduce tensions by putting an end to this economic battle-ground, and applying this plan to these economic battle-grounds. Couldn't we have a common economic policy with the Soviets and for example build the Aswan Dam as a common program. He noted Iraq, Guinea, etc. as examples of the type of area he had in mind. He thought an offer of such a common economic policy in far parts of the world would have a good effect in world public opinion. He stressed this not be just a vague offer, but a real proposal to reach an understanding. He thought that if the Soviets rejected our offer it would cause them propaganda difficulties.

The Secretary said we would have difficulties if the proposal were for the pooling of resources for a commonly-administered program, but if it were a proposal for a program employing separate resources, we would of course study it further. Debré said that without commenting at this time on administrative arrangements, he wanted to say that this program would put the Soviets in a difficult position because it would prove that the West is willing to cooperate anywhere in the world. Couve referred to the practice of certain Middle Eastern nations in playing off the West against the Soviets. He said he believed that was what was called "positive neutrality". While the Middle Eastern countries particularly followed this practice, Indonesia was another example.

Debré said that if there were a summit meeting, it was clear especially in Europe that Soviets would use it for massive propaganda purposes. Perhaps the Soviets would wish to settle some issues, and perhaps the British were partly correct in their assessment of the situation, but the principal Soviet interest was in a propaganda success as a further element in their peace campaign. Debré agreed we should continue to develop our ideas, but also remain on guard to prevent such a Soviet propaganda success. He thought US public opinion less susceptible than that in Europe in this context, but stressed we should not underestimate this propaganda aspect of summit meeting, which was fundamental. He thought it would be more difficult for Soviets to use Foreign Ministers' meeting for these objectives

and

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224

By BE NARA, 1-18-70

SECRET

-3-

and that at the Geneva meeting we should proceed cautiously and simply prevent a rupture there. The Secretary agreed to Debré's comment that a bi-partisan policy now existed but pointed out that even in the United States there were always dangers of foreign policy issues becoming also domestic political problems. Couve said that in France, only the Communist Party opposed French Government policy on Germany and said that the recent foreign affairs debate in the Assembly was proof of this.

Couve asked where a summit meeting should be held, if it is held. The Secretary said we had no fixed position. Couve noted that the British had proposed the summit meeting should be held on board a ship, not a warship. The Secretary said we had some worries about holding it in the United States for security reasons, especially in New York. He noted the presence of extremely bitter Hungarian and other Eastern European refugees in the United States which were hard to control. Couve noted that Khrushchev had spoken on several occasions of holding the summit meeting in San Francisco and believed he wanted to have it in the United States for propaganda purposes. The Secretary agreed that Khrushchev wanted to come to the United States. He said we would not necessarily object except on security grounds but noted that Khrushchev would undoubtedly wish to travel around outside the conference and this might pose problems. Couve said he would undoubtedly like to travel around the United States and show himself to be friendly, etc. The Secretary said he had expressed a desire to see the large industrial cities of our country. Couve referred to the propaganda aspects of the Mikoyan visit and thought a Khrushchev trip through the United States was not a very good idea. The Secretary said there was a certain superstition about Geneva because of past failure, and Couve said we could always shift to Lausanne.

Debré then asked the Secretary if he wished to discuss problems of the Atlantic Alliance. The Secretary replied in the affirmative and said we were disturbed at the failure to settle the atomic stockpile problem. The nine US fighter squadrons for which we wished to introduce atomic weapons were important during the present Berlin crisis. We wished this matter settled because General Norstad said we needed these squadrons properly equipped. If for their own reasons, the French were not prepared to have the atomic stockpile on their territory, it would be necessary to move the squadrons elsewhere.

Debré said that he would like to answer the Secretary's point frankly. He said he and Couve had discussed these problems at length with General de Gaulle. He said that these talks had been necessary as it was unthinkable to take any decisions on these matters without full examination with the General. Therefore the thoughts he was expressing were not personal ones but the considered view of the Government. He added that the time had come to examine here and in the United States the fundamental problem which were posed in the Atlantic Alliance. He said that from the

French

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224

By EE NARA 12-70

SECRET

-4-

French viewpoint there were three problems which he would outline and that it was within this context which could be solved the difficulty which General Norstad had raised. He said these problems had all been evoked before, and that he realized it was difficult to reach answers to all of them. He said the following were the three problems:

1) The de Gaulle Memorandum of last September wherein the French Government expounded its legitimate desire for permanent tripartite consultations in order to effect world-wide common policies.

2) Debré regretted that previous French governments had never explained this problem and as a result France had suffered greatly from lack of support for her interests in the Mediterranean, Algeria and Africa. He said Joxe had told Couve that the French had not in the past clearly explained this problem. Whether we like it or not, France has as much future in Algeria and in the Mediterranean as in Europe. France wishes to consolidate the Atlantic Alliance through agreement especially with the United States on French objectives in the Mediterranean and Africa. France must square her responsibilities in Europe with those in Africa. The events of May, 1958 in Algeria were caused in large part by the feeling of frustration in Algeria regarding lack of understanding on the part of France's allies, and the lack of a common Western policy for Algeria.

3) Progress must be made in the field of atomic cooperation. It is realized that France is the asker (demandeur) in this case. Nevertheless the matter is of extreme importance and France seeks cooperation both in the field of the peaceful uses and military uses of atomic energy.

Debré reiterated that the above represented the official policy of the French Government. He thought progress in these fields was necessary and asked that the United States consider seriously the possibilities of having frank talks on these three points - tripartite consultations, cooperation on the Mediterranean, Algeria and Africa, and atomic cooperation. He said these were three problems to be handled on Franco-US basis. France was admittedly the asker in the fields of tripartite consultation, and atomic cooperation. Point 2 - cooperation in the Mediterranean, Algeria and Africa - was an old problem which had been neglected in the past.

The Secretary replied that he would comment briefly. He was sorry the French had linked the atomic stockpile question with the three other questions listed above, as he thought the need for the atomic stockpile was in connection with the common defense, whereas the other three points were ones which should be discussed but disassociated from the atomic stockpile. With regard to tripartite consultations, the Secretary said we were agreeable to such talks, but did not wish to institutionalize

them

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224

By BE NARA 18-20

SECRET

-5-

them. He noted the recent talks in which Joxe participated in Washington, and the creation of various subcommittees to study specific problems. He thought that on this point we were accordingly moving in the right direction. With regard to point 2 on the Mediterranean, Algeria and Africa, the Secretary said we were studying M. Debré's recent letter to Ambassador Houghton on this subject. He hoped we could give a reply but added we needed time to study this problem. With regard to the third point on atomic cooperation, we were bound by certain legislative restrictions. Once the French had effected their first atomic explosion, we would be in a different position, and could talk substance to them. We were restrained by legislation from having such discussions under present circumstances. With regard to moving ahead on furnishing the French with the submarine reactor, which we had wanted to do, it was not possible at present because of the uncertainty with regard to the position of the French fleet. The Secretary noted we had recently initialed the agreement to furnish enriched fuel to France. However, with regard to the reactor, the Executive Branch of the Government did not see what could be done until we can see where we stand with regard to the French fleet. Under present circumstances, after the Congressional reaction to the fleet action had been so adverse, we did not believe there was a good chance of Congressional approval for furnishing the reactor to France. The Secretary then explained in some detail the structure of the Joint Atomic Energy Committee in Congress and the particularly powerful position which it occupies. Concluding on this point, the Secretary said that we did not of course know the timing of the French plans for the explosion of their first atomic bomb, but legislative restrictions on having talks with them would be alleviated by this action.

Couve inquired if it would be difficult to move the nine US fighter squadrons from France. The Secretary replied that he did not know the technical details but said something must be done even if it were necessary to bring the squadrons back to the United States, since they are useless under present conditions.

Regarding French policy in the Mediterranean, Debré said France would explain this in the framework of the Washington tripartite talks. Regarding the Mediterranean fleet, he thought that during the second half of May, the French would be in a position to present in Washington their ideas for cooperation and for reorganization of the Mediterranean command structure. We must have a new organization in the Mediterranean. Debré asked if there were obstacles to having continuous discussions on these problems including the Mediterranean organization, Mediterranean and African policy, etc. He also asked again if we could now have meaningful talks on atomic cooperation. The Secretary said he did not quite understand the connection between atomic cooperation and the other problems. Debré said these matters were linked in the French view. He regretted past

practices

SECRET

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224

By RE NARA, 1-18-70

SECRET

-6-

practices when France had never clearly expounded her view on the importance of the Mediterranean and Africa to France. It was difficult to imagine either French military or civilian authorities giving strong support to the Atlantic Alliance unless that organization and its principal members gave support to French interests in the Mediterranean and Africa. Algeria is as vital to France as anything in Europe.

The Secretary repeated his regret that the French were coupling these issues and making it appear we were asking a favor in the atomic stockpile matter whereas in fact we merely wished to equip the nine fighter squadrons with atomic weapons in order to meet the emergency situation in Berlin, and for the common good. This question should not be coupled with other more long-range issues. Debré said the fault was that of the Atlantic Treaty. He must explain the relationship of tripartite consultations, the French Mediterranean fleet, the atomic stockpile, etc. This was a difficult problem to understand, and the difficulty could be solved only by an overall negotiation covering problems within and beside the Atlantic Treaty. It would not be honest not to state that we will always have these recurring crises, even if there appears to be a linkage of problems which are superficially unrelated, until there is an overall settlement. Fundamentally, Debré continued, these problems are linked because they are all related to the French national security. He thought it was better to state this frankly.

The Secretary said the Prime Minister would understand that points 2 and 3 which Debré had mentioned took time to study and to seek to make adjustments, whereas the problem of the nine squadrons was an immediate one. He said he assumed the Prime Minister would understand if General Norstad found it necessary to move these squadrons. He said he was sorry, and hoped that this matter would not leak because it would be extremely awkward, and difficult to prevent an adverse public reaction in the United States if it became known that the French were linking these matters. Debré continued that matters were never so simple as they appeared. He understood the legislative difficulties under which we operated in the field of atomic cooperation, as well as the Congressional problem involved. In the field of atomic research, France was carrying and had been carrying for five years a heavy economic and financial burden in the field of atomic energy both in the peaceful uses and in the military uses sphere. France under these circumstances will continue her atomic program though the burden of this program for France could be reduced through atomic cooperation. Both the military and industrial uses portions of the French atomic program represented a heavy burden for her.

The Secretary explained that the US legislation which covered this problem had not been drafted so as to be discriminatory against France but rather to protect the whole world from a series of requests to us. We are not wedded to atomic weapons and eventually hope that the world situation will be such that we can get rid of them. However, in the meantime it would be embarrassing to us if we did not have this legislation

and

DECLASSIFIED

Authority NND 897224

By EE 1-18-70 NARA Date

SECRET

SECRET

-7-

and received requests from Italy, Japan and others for atomic weapons. France was developing an atomic know-how and the situation would be changed when she had achieved it.

Debré said again that he believed it necessary to speak very frankly about these difficult problems. He said there was no doubt regarding basic French policy. He thought the problems which he had covered should have been explained before. He said all of the efforts of the French Government were to forge a solid France which would be asset to the West, and he believed a good start had been made in this direction.

Debré then turned to the subject of arms for Guinea, and said this situation concerned France considerably. He said there should be an agreement to prevent Soviet arms shipments to Guinea. He said this subject could be discussed in the tripartite forum in Washington but we must prevent finding that in two, three or five years popular democracies had emerged in Africa. He thought Communist efforts were even greater in Black Africa than in North Africa, and said France was prepared to undertake a cooperative effort to prevent Soviet exploitation in this region. The Secretary noted this was a real problem and referred to the emergence of more and more independent states in this area. He thought we had been right to limit arms shipments to the Middle East at one time, and added that difficulty was in policing such an agreement.

Couve said discussions regarding Guinea could continue in Washington. Debré added that Guinea was only the first case, and that there would be other similar ones. The arms shipments from Communist countries were of course in effect gifts and not real sales. Debré said he was also worried by the activity of the recent African Workers' Congress, and in the trend for Black African students to go to Communist bloc countries to study. Couve referred to the problem in the Belgian Congo and said this was too large an area for Belgium to hold and expressed the view Belgium would in fact lose it. Debré said the prevention of the emergence of Communist states in Africa was one more reason for close tripartite consultations. The Secretary said that this situation had been one of the topics discussed with Joxe in Washington. Debré said that the tendency for increased propaganda in Africa based on racial considerations was also disquieting as was the development of a phenomenon such as Sekou Touré. He concluded noting that these situations were another reason to pursue the de Gaulle Plan which was susceptible of putting the Soviets at a disadvantage.

The Secretary concluded that Debré would understand that he was not prepared for a discussion of the Algerian situation as raised in the Debré letter as yet. Debré closed noting the profound concern which France had in the problems which he had outlined to the Secretary today. The meeting terminated at 4:40 p.m.

RHMcBride:jd:5/2/59

SECRET

